

PERFECTIONISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO RACIAL IDENTITY,
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE, STRESS AND COPING

A Dissertation

by

ANGELA M. BOWMAN HEADS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Perfectionism and Its Relationship to Racial Identity, Satisfaction with Life,
Stress and Coping. (August 2009)

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The study of perfectionism has grown over the past few years with most of the interest focused on the relationship between perfectionism and psychological functioning. Although the literature on perfectionism has continued to increase, the study of the impact of cultural differences on perfectionism and psychological functioning has been understudied. This study examines the relationships between racial identity, perfectionism and satisfaction of life along with other factors that may mediate this relationship such as coping style and stress. A multicultural model of the stress process posited by Slavin, Rainer, et al. (1991) provides a basis for examining the importance of cultural influences on perfectionism. 122 African American women were recruited via university organization listservs and email lists and through direct contact with university professors to complete surveys on perfectionism, life satisfaction, stress and coping. Analysis of data indicated that individuals in the pre-encounter status of racial identity reported lower satisfaction with life. This finding is consistent with

prior studies. Findings also included a significant positive relationship ($p < .05$) between internalization status of racial identity and socially prescribed perfectionism. Additionally emotion oriented coping was found to fully mediate the relationship between socially oriented perfectionism and satisfaction with life ($Z = -1.9722$, $p < .05$).

These findings highlight the relevance of cultural factors when considering assessment and intervention strategies for African American women. Additionally the significant contribution of coping style to life satisfaction gives guidance in how to intervene with clients in a clinical setting. The findings suggest that reducing the reliance on emotion oriented coping strategies may be important in improving life satisfaction in African American women.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my father,

Charles L. Bowman. You are missed.

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First I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to get through this sometimes very challenging process and for placing me on the right path and putting the right people in my life at the right time.

I would like to thank my committee chair, Linda Castillo, for your patience, encouragement and support. You never let me think that I couldn't do this! I would also like to thank my committee members, Daniel Brossart, Marisol Perez and Jamilia Blake, for their advice and guidance throughout the course of this research.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| DEDICATION | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | vi |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | vii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | ix |
| LIST OF TABLES | x |
| CHAPTER | |
| I INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Theoretical Foundations in the Study of Perfectionism | 4 |
| Perfectionism and Life Satisfaction | 12 |
| Stress..... | 14 |
| Perfectionism and Coping | 17 |
| Perfectionism and Cultural Differences..... | 20 |
| Racial Identity | 22 |
| The Current Study..... | 27 |
| II METHODS..... | 30 |
| Participants..... | 30 |
| Measures..... | 31 |
| Possible Mediating Variables..... | 32 |
| Procedure..... | 33 |
| III RESULTS | 35 |
| IV SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS..... | 42 |
| Limitations | 46 |
| Conclusions, Implications and Future Research..... | 48 |

| | Page |
|------------------|------|
| REFERENCES | 51 |
| VITA | 58 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE | Page |
|---|------|
| 1 Proposed model of the effect of racial identity and perfectionism on satisfaction with life | 28 |

LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE | | Page |
|-------|---|------|
| 1 | Participant Characteristics (N=122) | 30 |
| 2 | Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measures (N=122) | 36 |
| 3 | Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Satisfaction with Life (N=122) | 38 |
| 4 | Sobel and Bootstrap Analyses of the Indirect Effect of Stress and Coping Style on the Relationship Between Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Satisfaction with Life. | 41 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been an increased interest in studying the relationship between perfectionism and psychological functioning. Many studies have focused on the negative consequences related to perfectionism with findings of greater depression, stress and anxiety being associated with higher levels of perfectionism (Castro & Rice, 2003; Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004; Kawamura, Hunt, Frost, & DiBartolo, 2001). However, only a handful of studies have made a distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism or focused on how perfectionism relates to both positive and negative psychological functioning. Hamachek (1978) first made the distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionism. This distinction has been largely neglected in the literature until recently when the focus has turned to the concept of perfectionism as a multidimensional construct with adaptive and maladaptive aspects.

Although the literature on perfectionism has continued to increase, the study of the impact of cultural differences on perfectionism and psychological functioning has been understudied. Most studies on perfectionism either did not look at cultural differences and relied primarily on White samples or did not

This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.

report the racial or ethnic representation (Nilsson, Paul, Lupini, & Tatem, 1999). There has been increasing concern that cultural issues be addressed in the research (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993) .

Scholars have noted that racial/ethnic minorities cannot be easily compared to the majority culture and variability across cultures in many areas of psychology have prompted researchers to question the generalizability of many psychological theories (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). For example, African Americans and European Americans have been shown to differ on the strength of the relationship between parental attachment and psychological adjustment (Rice, Cunningham & Young, 1997). Additionally, African Americans and European Americans differ in the type and degree of stress experienced with researchers having found that the experience of stress is strongly tied to elements of an individual's identity (e.g. race and gender) (Woods-Giscombe & Lobel, 2008).

Additionally, previous research has shown gender differences on several measures of psychological adjustment including stress, coping, depression and self esteem (Landrine et al., 1995; Klonoff et al., 2000). Differences on these measures may be due to the experience of oppression and discrimination amongst socially disadvantaged groups including women and ethnic minorities (Outten, Schmitt, Garcia & Branscombe, 2009). According to Woods-Giscombe & Lobel (2008), the consideration of both race and gender are important in

getting a clear picture of how stress affects women. The types of stressors experienced specifically by African American women and their perceptions of their stressors are tied to their unique socio-cultural experiences (Brown, Parker-Dominguez & Sorey, 2000).

There have been relatively few studies that have examined perfectionism specifically in the African American population. Studies that have been conducted have identified differences between African American and other groups on dimensions of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1993). For example, studies have found that African American students report higher Parental Expectation, a domain of perfectionism, than White students (Nilsson et al., 1999; Castro & Rice, 2003). Chang, Watkins and Banks (2004) found greater levels of adaptive perfectionism among White women compared to African American women.

While the above listed studies did examine the possible differences between different ethnic groups on these psychological measures, they did not attempt to explain the process by which culture might account for these differences. Betancourt and Lopez (1993) expressed concern about the tendency of some investigators to not consider culture at all in their research and theories while other investigators sometimes fail to identify specific aspects of culture that may influence behavior or psychological adjustment. This leads to a limited understanding that there may be differences in how diverse cultures experience the world on a psychological level but very little understanding about why and the implications that go along with this.

A limitation of current perfectionism research is that it has focused on the negative consequences of perfectionism and has failed to look at possible contributing cultural factors, such as racial identity, that may contribute to the relationship between perfectionism and psychological adjustment. Exploring racial identity attitudes as they relate to perfectionism is a new area in the perfectionism research and may contribute positively to the understanding of how perfectionism affects African American women. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the experience of perfectionism among African American women and how their racial identity and perfectionist tendencies will influence their satisfaction with life.

Theoretical Foundations in the Study of Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a topic that has received increased attention in the research literature (O'Connor, 2007; Chang, Sanna, Chang & Bodem, 2008). However, a clear definition of this construct has not been developed. An early definition accepted by many researchers characterizes perfectionism as the tendency to set and adhere to excessively high goals and personally demanding standards (Burns, 1980; Hollender, 1965). This definition is based on the conceptualization that perfectionism is a unidimensional construct and a pathological personality style (Burns, 1980). In one of the earliest descriptions of perfectionism, Hollender (1965) described perfectionism as a maladaptive construct and noted that the demands the perfectionist makes on him/herself may be oppressive leading to a loss of hope and depression. This view

supports the conceptualization that perfectionism can be measured as a continuous construct with higher scoring individuals exhibiting poor psychological adjustment and negative consequences such as suicidality, anxiety and eating disorders (Broman-Fulks, Hill & Green, 2008).

In his clinical observations on perfectionism, Pacht (1984) linked maladaptive perfectionism to numerous psychological and physical problems and pointed out that, although achieving goals helps to avoid disappointment, the maladaptive perfectionist is rarely satisfied with the results. This trend in the research has continued in more recent studies that link maladaptive perfectionism to depression, eating disorders, anxiety, suicide attempts and a host of other difficulties (Blatt, 1995; Castro & Rice, 2003; Chang & Rand, 2000; Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Chang et al., 2008).

One problem with characterizing perfectionism in this unidimensional, pathological way is that it does not take into account individuals who do set high goals for themselves, are successful by their own standards at achieving these goals and do not have any problems related to this. This is quite a difference from those individuals who set the high goals and are critical of themselves and find little satisfaction in their successes (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). To address this issue researchers have added to the definition of perfectionism as the tendency to set and adhere to excessively high goals and personally demanding standards and to engage in highly critical self evaluations. This includes a tendency to focus on failures and ignore successes (Chang &

Rand, 2000; Shafran, Cooper, & Fairburn, 2002). Another important distinction between different conceptualizations of perfectionism is whether it is viewed as a unidimensional or a multidimensional construct.

The recognition of perfectionism as a multidimensional construct with both positive and negative aspects has allowed researchers to begin looking at the differences between types of perfectionists and the effect that their perfectionism has on psychological functioning. Hamachek (1978) was one of the first to make a distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionists. Hamachek characterized normal perfectionists as individuals who work hard at achieving success, are able to derive pleasure from their efforts and “feel free to be less precise as the situation permits.” Neurotic perfectionists are those whose efforts “never seem quite good enough, at least in their own eyes” and are unable to feel satisfaction because they never seem to do things quite well enough. They feel that they should be able to do better no matter what they have managed to achieve (Hamachek, 1978).

This distinction was widely ignored in the literature until more recently when researchers made efforts to represent perfectionism as a multidimensional construct. For example, Frost et al. (1990) posited that perfectionism becomes problematic for some individuals when accompanied by overly critical evaluations of one’s own behaviors. Working from Hamachek’s (1978) distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionism, Frost et al. (1990) noted that due to an over concern for mistakes and doubts about performance,

maladaptive perfectionists may be more driven by a fear of failure rather than a genuine desire to be successful. Early researchers have also found that perfectionists have a tendency to be overly concerned about neatness (Hollender, 1965) and are driven by a need to gain the approval of their parents and may have spent early years in homes where acceptance and love were conditional (Hamachek, 1978; Burns, 1980).

From these observations, Frost et al. (1990) developed a multidimensional model of perfectionism based on a conceptualization of the negative aspect of perfectionism which results from setting high standards and a critical self evaluation of performance. Frost conceptualized perfectionism to be comprised of six domains. One domain is Personal Standards. The Personal Standards domain is characterized by the setting of high standards and the excessive importance placed on those standards with regards to self evaluation. Individuals high in this domain are rarely happy with accomplishments seldom feeling that what they do has achieved the desired results. A second domain is Concern Over Mistakes. This domain is characterized by a negative view of mistakes. Individuals high in this domain may consider even minor mistakes to be evidence of failure. These individuals may be driven to reach goals more out of a fear of making mistakes than out of a desire to be successful.

A third domain of perfectionism is Parental Expectations which is characterized by the tendency to believe that parents set excessively high standards. This perception leads to a striving for perfection because of a fear of

disappointing parents and consequently losing parental love. Parental Criticism is the fourth domain. This domain is characterized by the perception that parents are overly critical and that parents will not believe that accomplishments are good enough. A fifth domain is Doubts About Actions, which is characterized by the feeling that tasks are not completed to satisfaction no matter how carefully they are done. Individuals high on this domain may fail to recognize accomplishments. The doubts here are not due to recognition of specific mistakes but a vague sense that the task could have been done better. Lastly, the sixth domain of perfectionism is Organization which is characterized by an over concern for organization and orderliness. This includes a preference for neatness.

Hewitt and Flett (1991) also conceptualized perfectionism as being multidimensional and have identified perfectionism as having three dimensions. One dimension is Self Oriented Perfectionism (“I must always be successful at school or work.”). Individuals who are described as self-oriented perfectionists are highly self critical and have the tendency to set “exacting standards for” themselves. They also tend to stringently evaluate and censure their behavior. Hewitt and Flett (1991) theorized that self oriented perfectionists would be driven not only by a desire to attain perfection but also by a desire to avoid failure. Self oriented perfectionism has been linked to anxiety, depression, eating disorders and low self esteem (Flett, Greene & Hewitt 2004).

A second dimension is Other Oriented Perfectionism (“I have high expectations for the people who are important to me.”). This dimension describes individuals’ tendencies to have unrealistic standards for others. The stringent evaluation of performance in this case is directed at others with a strong emphasis on other people being perfect. Hewitt and Flett (1991) believed that other oriented perfectionism may lead to feelings of hostility and blame towards others but may also be an indication of desirable leadership qualities in individuals.

The final dimension according to Hewitt and Flett’s theory is Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially prescribed perfectionists believe that other people set excessively high standards for them and have the perception that significant others are evaluating them stringently and exerting pressure on them to be perfect. An example of how a socially prescribed perfectionist would think is reflected in the statement, “The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do.” Since the feeling of pressure to be perfect from others is viewed as excessive, distress may be experienced by the individual due to the perception that they are not able to please the important people in their lives.

Frost et al. (1993) empirically examined his and Hewitt and Flett’s multidimensional models of perfectionism and how they might relate to each other. A factor analytic study of both the Frost et al. (1990) and Hewitt and Flett’s (1991) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) was conducted with

data from 553 college students. Results of the analysis produced two factors. The first, Maladaptive Evaluative Concerns, consisted of scales from the Frost (1990) MPS including Concern Over Mistakes, Parental Criticism, Parental Expectations and Doubts About Actions along with the Socially Prescribed Perfectionism from Hewitt and Flett's (1991) MPS. The second factor was called Positive Strivings and consisted of the Self Oriented Perfectionism scale from Hewitt and Flett's (1991) MPS and the Personal Standards and Organization scales from Frost's (1990) MPS. The Positive Strivings factor reflects the more positive and adaptive aspects of perfectionism. Individuals high on this factor may be those who are high achievers who find success through the use of organizational skills and who are driven by high expectations for themselves.

Based on these findings, Frost et al. (1993) suggested that perfectionism is not unidirectional and consists of both positive and negative traits. This is consistent with Hamachek's (1978) distinction between normal and neurotic perfectionism and marks the growing consensus in theory that two types of perfectionism can be distinguished (Slade and Owens, 1998).

Wanting to test this assertion, Terry-Short, Glynn Owens, Slade and Dewey (1995) developed a questionnaire designed to tap both positive and negative aspects of perfectionism. The Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS) was created after examining several existing measures of perfectionism and finding that most items across the different scales focused on either clearly negative outcomes or ambiguous outcomes with only a few

positive items. A new 40-item measure was constructed with more balance between positive and negative items. This scale was administered to 281 women (225 control, 20 female athletes, 21 eating disordered women and 15 depressed women) age 17-49. Information on ethnicity was not reported for this study. The results of the factor analyses clearly showed that two distinct types of perfectionism can be identified.

Furthermore, group comparisons revealed that, compared to the control group, the athletes tended to score higher on positive perfectionism and at a normal level for negative perfectionism. Depressed participants scored higher on negative perfectionism and at a normal level for positive perfectionism. Eating disordered participants had high scores on both positive and negative perfectionism. Terry-Short et al. (1995) highlighted the affect that type of perfectionism can have on the outcomes and further supported the view of perfectionism as having both positive and negative aspects.

Slade and Owens (1998) reviewed the literature on perfectionism and also confirmed Frost et al.'s (1993) findings that perfectionism is multidimensional and consists of positive and negative traits. The researchers proposed a dual process model of perfectionism with positive and negative aspects further distinguished in terms of approach and avoidance behavior and goal differences. In this model, positive perfectionism refers to behaviors and cognitions that aim to achieve goals and result in positive consequences while negative perfectionism refers to behaviors and cognitions that aim to achieve

high level goals while avoiding negative consequences. A person high in positive perfectionism would strive to pursue success and a person high on negative perfectionism would strive to avoid failure.

As the findings of these studies suggest, perfectionism viewed as a unidimensional or a primarily maladaptive construct gives an incomplete picture. Perfectionism, depending on the individual's perception and expectations about consequences of success or failure, can have either negative or positive outcomes. Thus, the current study conceptualizes perfectionism as multidimensional with both positive and negative attributes.

Perfectionism and Life Satisfaction

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between perfectionism and psychological adjustment. Perfectionism has been found to be associated with psychological maladjustments such as anxiety (Alden, Ryder, & Mellings, 2002; Flett, Greene, & Hewitt, 2004; Frost & DiBartolo, 2002), depression (Blatt, 1995; Castro & Rice, 2003), procrastination (Ferrari, 1992), suicide (Blatt, 1995; Chang, 1998) and eating disorders (Davis, 1997). Although much research has been done on the maladjustment of perfectionism, few studies have examined the relationship of perfectionism to positive psychological outcomes such as life satisfaction.

Diener et al. (1985) viewed life satisfaction as one of the main components making up subjective well being and defined it as a cognitive judgmental process in which individuals make comparisons between the way

their lives currently are and a set of internally defined standards that the person has set for him/herself. Studies of satisfaction with life and perfectionism have shown that individuals higher on perfectionism report lower satisfaction with life (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998). There have also been studies examining the difference between positive and negative forms of perfectionism on life satisfaction with findings that negative perfectionism is associated with lower life satisfaction while positive perfectionism is associated with higher satisfaction with life (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

In a study using a sample of university students and a sample of Internet users, Stoeber and Stoeber (2009) investigated how perfectionism related to gender, age, and satisfaction with life. They found that being perfectionistic in domains related to sports and time management resulted in higher satisfaction with life and concluded that these domains of perfectionism may be related to the positive aspects of perfectionism.

Other studies have made comparisons of adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism. For example, in a study of 509 high school students (age 14-21, 61% male) in Hong Kong, a comparison of group means revealed that adaptive perfectionists reported higher satisfaction with life scores and lower depression scores than in the students who were characterized as maladaptive perfectionists or non perfectionists (Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009).

Both of these studies indicate that there are both positive and negative aspects of perfectionism. These studies give examples of how perfectionism

can affect satisfaction with life and indicate that this is an area of study that can benefit from further investigation.

Stress

According to Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman and Mullan (1981) stress is made up of three domains which include sources, mediators and manifestations of stress. Most conceptualizations of the stress process start with an event which the individual perceives as threatening. The presence of stress can be manifested in many ways from a biological standpoint (somatic complaints) to more overt emotional or behavioral manifestations such as social functioning and morale (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Slavin, Rainer, McCreary, & Gowda, 1991) and coping often mediates the effects of stress on outcome (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988a, 1988b; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Several researchers have studied the effects of stress on psychological adjustment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Chang, 2000; Barnes & Lightsey, 2005). A few, notably Chang and his colleagues, have explored the effects of the combination of stress and perfectionism on psychological functioning with stress acting either as a mediator or a vulnerability factor in the development of psychological symptoms (diathesis) (Chang, 1998; Chang & Rand, 2000; Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004).

According to Hewitt and Flett (1991) when perfectionism is combined with stress, the result is greater maladjustment. In support of this assertion, Chang and Rand (2000) studied 215 college students (93% Caucasian) and found that

the more harmful effects of socially prescribed perfectionism seemed to be activated when higher levels of stress were also present. When there was low stress, socially prescribed perfectionism had no significant influence on psychological adjustment. Chang et al. (2004) found that stress mediated the link between perfectionism and psychological functioning in African American and White college students. This supported Chang's (1998) earlier study of perfectionism and psychological functioning in older and younger adults which also found that stress mediated the influence of perfectionism on life satisfaction in both groups.

Although stress has been shown to help explain the relationship between perfectionism and life satisfaction, the type of stress may differ for racial/ethnic minority students. Slavin et al. (1991) proposed a multicultural model of the stress process that included factors such as how membership into certain cultural groups affects the experience of potentially stressful life events. This model was an expansion of a standard model of the stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which includes five components: the occurrence of a potentially stressful event, primary cognitive appraisal of the event, secondary cognitive appraisal of the event (What can be done about it?), implementation of coping efforts and adaptational outcomes (physical and mental health).

The multicultural model of the stress process expanded on these five components to include factors related to cultural status that may influence the experience of stress. In the first phase (occurrence of a potentially stressful

event), events related to minority or socioeconomic status and events related to discrimination or oppression are included as potentially stressful. During the primary appraisal phase the cultural or family definition of the event and how the event is viewed within a cultural framework is examined. Here one may ask how being a member of a particular cultural group shapes how the event is viewed or how stress is defined. During the secondary appraisal phase ethnic identity and beliefs about group members' ability to cope, availability of resources and views about how the system works for or against this group are considered.

Implementation of coping efforts could depend on choices available to this specific cultural group. Finally the multicultural model of the stress process considers acceptable symptom presentation for a particular cultural group and what is an acceptable way of showing distress for certain groups (Slavin et al., 1991).

This multicultural view of the stress process may be an important clue in explaining the unique experience of the relationship between perfectionism and psychological adjustment in African American women. For example, in a study of 150 Black women and 150 White women, Chang et al. (2004) found that stress mediated the link between perfectionism and psychological functioning in both groups. Further the study found that Black women in the study reported greater stress and negative affect and less satisfaction with life than White women and that stress fully mediated the relationship between perfectionism and psychological functioning in Black women. Considering the multicultural

view of the stress process it would be important to consider how cultural aspects influence the experience of stress and whether this might account for some of the difference in psychological outcomes.

Perfectionism and Coping

Several studies have examined the effects of coping style on psychological adjustment and life satisfaction with maladaptive coping strategies found to be a predictor of psychological distress. For example Kopp, Skrabski and Szedmak (2000) found a relationship between what is referred to as maladaptive coping styles and depressive symptoms. Problem-solving coping has been found to be associated with increases in positive emotions and decreases in negative emotions. For example, in one study, planful problem-solving coping was associated with an improved emotional state, i.e. less negative emotion and more positive emotion. However, confrontive coping which involved an expression of anger or hostility with regard to the stressful situation was associated with worsened emotional states (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988b).

Similarly, in a study of 114 African American students, perceived racial discrimination, coping, stress and life satisfaction; avoidance coping was found to inversely predict life satisfaction (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005). Also, according to Clark et al. (1999), both adaptive and maladaptive coping responses influence the duration and intensity of psychological stress responses.

Types of coping strategies used may also have implications for improving psychological functioning. For example, in a study of life satisfaction and race related stress with a sample of 104 Black undergraduate students, Danoff-Burg, Prelow and Swenson (2004) found that students with low hope who used more active coping strategies had higher satisfaction with life. This indicates that coping may be an important factor to consider when studying psychological adjustment as it may be an important contributor to adjustment indicators such as satisfaction with life.

Aspects of stress and coping are intertwined. In fact one definition describes stress as the cognitive state that results when an individual perceives that demands placed on them in a situation are greater than their ability to cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However studies have indicated that the methods of coping available to and employed by individuals can have an effect on stress (Fuemmeler, Mullins, Van Pelt, Carpenter & Parkhyrst, 2005). Because of the influence that coping and stress can have on each other and the evidence in the literature showing that coping and stress have varied effects on psychological adjustment, the two constructs will be examined separately.

While there are many studies of the relationship between coping style and life satisfaction, there are only a few that examine the relationship between coping and perfectionism. In a study of 233 university students (racial demographics were not reported), Dunkley and Blankstein (2000) found a significant relationship between self-critical perfectionism and maladaptive

coping. Specifically, they found that self critical perfectionists, those who strive for high achievement and are constantly harshly critical of themselves (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992), are more likely to respond to stress with more emotional responses and fewer problem-oriented attempts to deal with a problem (Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000). Similarly Dunkley et al. (2000), in a study of 443 predominately White university students, found that evaluative concerns perfectionists tend to engage in an avoidant coping style.

Studies have examined the influence of coping style on perfectionism and psychological distress using the various proposed models of perfectionism including Hewitt and Flett's (1991) model. For example, in a study of coping and perfectionism in 213 university students, O'Connor and O'Connor (2003) found that socially prescribed perfectionism along with a maladaptive coping style was predictive of hopelessness and psychological distress. Cultural variables were not reported in this study. Similarly, in a study using a sample of 344 college students (149 male and 195 female, 89.8% Caucasian, 4.5% African American, 1.7% Asian American, 2% Hispanic, 0.6% American Indian, and 1.4% unknown), Bergman, Nyland and Burns (2007) found that negative perfectionism correlated with emotional suppression as a coping mechanism and depression while positive perfectionism was found to correlate with life-satisfaction.

These studies demonstrate that coping combined with perfectionism can have an influence on psychological functioning. There are, however, a relatively

small number of studies of life satisfaction, coping and perfectionism and even fewer that consider cultural influences on these factors.

Perfectionism and Cultural Differences

Relatively few studies have examined perfectionism and cultural differences. Some studies have used the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS, Frost et al., 1990) to compare levels of perfectionism in White, Black and Asian American college students. For example, Nilsson, Paul, Lupini and Tatem (1999) found differences between Black and White college students on measures of perfectionism. In this study, Black students reported higher Parental Expectation than White students, while White students reported more concern over mistakes.

In another study comparing different ethnic groups, Castro and Rice (2003) found that Asian American students reported higher parental criticism and doubt about actions than White and Black students. Black and Asian students reported higher parental expectations than White students. White and Black students reported similar levels of concern over mistakes, parental criticism and doubt about actions.

Chang et al. (2004) proposed a stress mediation model for examining how adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism relate to positive and negative psychological functioning in Black and White women. They found greater levels of adaptive perfectionism among White women. However, there was no difference between Black and White women on maladaptive perfectionism.

They found that for both groups maladaptive perfectionism was associated with stress. Further analysis showed that stress completely mediated the association between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological functioning with Black women and partially mediated the association between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological functioning for White women.

This indicates that for African American women, stress seems to be more predictive of psychological distress than perfectionism. The researchers cautioned that these results should not be interpreted as showing Black women as more distressed than White women but noted that there may likely be notable normative differences between White and Black women on the measures used in this study. Based on the results of this study, they concluded that it may be helpful for counselors to focus on the experience of stress rather than perfectionist tendencies when working with Black female students. The authors suggested using a different measure of stress in attempting to replicate the findings and testing for other possible replicators. Although not discussed extensively in the study, a consideration of specific cultural factors that may influence stress as outlined in the Slavin et al. (1991) multicultural model of the stress process could help to explain these differences.

The studies of perfectionism in racial/ethnic minorities are limited but findings generally point to differences between Whites and other groups on the dimensions of perfectionism. Specifically Whites score higher on measures of Self Oriented Perfectionism and Concern Over Mistakes while Black Americans

score higher on Socially Prescribed, Parental Expectations and Other Oriented Perfectionism (Castro & Rice, 2003; Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004; Nilsson, Paul, Lupini, & Tatem, 1999). One possible explanation could be the influence of African Americans' racial identity status on their world view of perfectionism.

Racial Identity

Racial identity has been an important area of research and has been recognized as a factor contributing to psychological adjustment. Racial identity is defined as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group," (Helms, 1990, p. 3). Helms (1994) created a model of racial identity development based on Cross's Model of Nigrescence (Cross, 1971). Cross originally proposed a four stage model in which each stage represented the view that individuals have of themselves based on race along with the attitudes they have about Black and White groups. Helms revised the model suggesting that each stage is a distinct worldview and a way that people organize racial information about themselves and others (Helms, 1990).

The Helms model for African Americans is made up of five ego statuses. The first status is known as Pre-Encounter and involves a rejection or devaluing of one's own culture and idealization of the majority (White) culture. In this status, an individual views their own culture in a negative light and struggles with negotiating these negative feelings about the group to which he/she belongs by separating from it. The person in the pre-encounter status may consider

themselves to be exceptional if they are successful in fitting into the majority culture and consider those who are not successful in fitting in to be lacking in some essential quality (Helms, 1990).

The second status is called Encounter and involves confusion about one's own culture and the majority culture. This status is marked by the realization that they will not become an accepted part of the "White" culture. This realization usually comes about as the result of an event or events that makes the individual aware that no matter how much an African American person conforms to White standards, he/she may still be considered inferior by some members of the majority culture. Such events can include incidents of racial discrimination. It then becomes necessary to work towards developing a new identity (Helms, 1990). The third and fourth statuses are often combined as Immersion/Emersion. Individuals who begin to immerse themselves in their own culture and simultaneously reject the white culture in the process characterize this status. The individual also begins to foster more positive relationships with others of his/her race and will experience more pride and will have a more balanced view of different cultures (Helms, 1990). An individual in this status will be more likely to attend more educational events promoting cultural awareness and will seek out opportunities to participate in activities that promote awareness and social justice.

The last status, Internalization, is characterized by a growing recognition of the contributions of all races, recognition of the oppression experienced by

different groups and a drive to promote change (Helms, 1990). Individuals in this status become more open to other cultures while becoming willing to share about their own and is characterized by a general spirit of acceptance.

A consideration of racial identity status may have some important implications in the study of the cultural influences on perfectionism. For example, pre-encounter status is characterized as a rejection of the individual's own culture and an embracing of the majority culture's values. In order to negotiate the conflict this brings about, the individual in pre-encounter status may need to separate from their own cultural group. This could lead to some judgments about others similar to those found in the other oriented perfectionist's stringent evaluation of the performance of others. By finding fault in their own cultural group, the individual in pre-encounter can see themselves as better or different.

Both immersion/emersion and internalization identity statuses have potential to be indicative of socially prescribed perfectionism. In immersion/emersion, the individual begins to find value in his/her own culture. This status is also characterized by more involvement in becoming educated about the culture and seeking out individuals in the form of elders or others knowledgeable in the culture who can provide more information and exposure to the culture. Individuals in this status may seek out the approval of those mentors or elders who are important to them as an indicator of how well they are fitting in to the culture. This may be connected to socially prescribed

perfectionism and the perception that one must meet the expectations of others. This may also occur with individuals in the internalization status but for different reasons. This status is characterized by an acceptance of the contributions that all cultures have to offer. There is also in this status a drive to promote change in the experience of oppression in all cultures. Due to a desire to be successful for the benefit of others, this focus on making change and helping others might also be connected to socially prescribed perfectionism and the need to meet the expectations of others.

A thorough search of the literature revealed no studies on the relationship between racial identity and life satisfaction. However, researchers have found a link between racial identity status and psychological adjustment, a construct that has been shown to be positively related to life satisfaction (Heller, Watson & Ilies, 2006; Seaton & Yip, 2009). One study found that racial identity attitudes related to psychological health in a group of African American women (Pyant & Yanico, 1991). Specifically Pyant and Yanico (1991) found that participants in the Pre-Encounter status reported less general well being and had lower self esteem. Munford's (1994) study confirmed the findings that pre-encounter status is related to psychological adjustment. In this study of Black university students, Munford (1994) found that Pre-encounter and Encounter status were positively related to depression while Internalization status was negatively related to depression.

Neville and Lilly (2000) further differentiated the Internalization status into three underlying dimensions: Engaged, Committed, and Dissonance. The authors described Engaged Internalization as a dimension in which the individual exhibits comfort with their racial identity as well as comfort with confronting racial issues. Individuals in the Committed Internalization status were characterized as having internalized a positive Black identity. While individuals in the Dissonance Internalization status were described as having internalized a Black identity but also feeling confused and conflicted by race and racism in society. Data from this study of 182 African American college students suggested that participants who reported higher Engaged Internalization type also reported lower levels of general psychological distress than the Dissonance Internalization group. The Committed Internalization group reported fewer Paranoid Ideation symptoms than the Dissonance Internalization group. They also found that the Engaged Internalization group reported significantly lower psychological distress when compared with the Undifferentiated racial identity group. This supported the hypothesis that individuals who are comfortable with their Black identity and aware of racial issues report lower levels of psychological distress than do people who are not sure about their racial identity.

As indicated in previous research, pre-encounter and internalization status have been associated with psychological adjustment. Prior studies of the construct validity of the Racial Identity Attitudes Scale have found that the scale

does little to distinguish the encounter status of racial identity (Ponterotto & Wise, 1987; Yanico, Swanson & Tokar, 1994). Thus for this study this aspect of racial identity has not been examined. Given that there have been no studies published specifically addressing the issue of racial identity, perfectionism, and life satisfaction, this study will examine the relationship of pre-encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization statuses of racial identity with perfectionism and life satisfaction.

The Current Study

The present study examines the experience of perfectionism among African American women and how their perfectionist tendencies will influence their life satisfaction. Racial identity statuses are also examined in the current study. Previous studies have shown a relationship between racial identity attitudes and psychological adjustment. There have also been studies examining the relationship between perfectionism and psychological adjustment. However, no published studies have been found to date examining how racial identity might be related to perfectionism and life satisfaction. Based on previous literature and theory surrounding racial identity and perfectionism, these relationships will be examined in the current study. Figure 1 provides a conceptualization of the study.

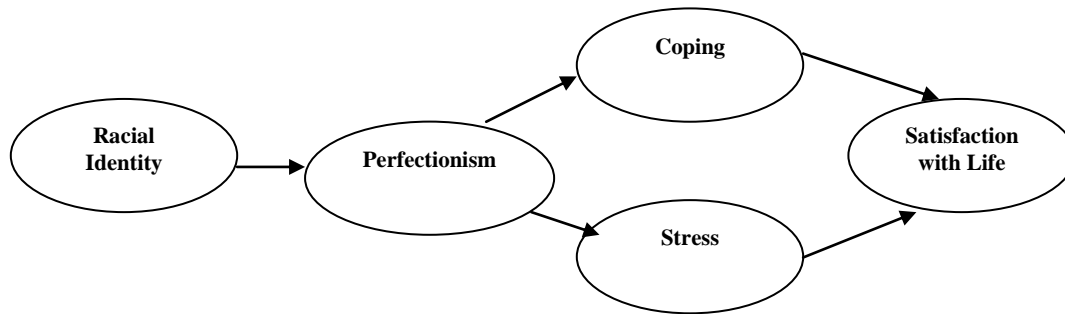


Fig.1 Proposed model of the effect of racial identity and perfectionism on satisfaction with life.

The following hypotheses were examined in the current study:

Racial Identity and Life Satisfaction

1. There will be a significant negative relationship between pre-encounter status of racial identity and life satisfaction.
2. There will be a significant negative relationship between Immersion/Emersion status of racial identity and life satisfaction.
3. There will be a significant positive relationship between Internalization status of racial identity and life satisfaction.

Racial Identity and Perfectionism

4. There will be a significant positive relationship between pre-encounter status of racial identity and other oriented perfectionism.
5. There will be a significant positive relationship between immersion/emersion status of racial identity and socially prescribed perfectionism.

6. There will be a significant positive relationship between Internalization status of racial identity and socially prescribed perfectionism.

Perfectionism and Life Satisfaction

7. There will be a significant negative relationship between other oriented perfectionism and life satisfaction.
8. There will be a significant negative relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and life satisfaction.

Predictors of Life Satisfaction

9. After controlling for age and education, racial identity and perfectionism will be significant predictors of life satisfaction.

Mediators of Perfectionism and Life Satisfaction

Although previous studies have consistently found a link between perfectionism and psychological adjustment, the effect sizes in these studies have been small to medium. This suggests that there are possibly other variables contributing to the relationship. Therefore, a final hypothesis is as follows:

10. Coping style and stress will mediate the relationship between perfectionism and life satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 122 African American women who were recruited via email and listservs of various university organizations and directly in university classrooms. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 59 years ($M=29.02$, $SD=10.52$). Basic demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics (N=122)

| Variable | N | % |
|------------------|----|------|
| Age | 19 | 15.6 |
| 19-20 | | |
| 21-22 | 24 | 19.7 |
| 23-24 | 18 | 14.6 |
| 25-26 | 11 | 9.0 |
| 27-29 | 11 | 9.0 |
| 30-39 | 16 | 13.1 |
| 40-49 | 14 | 11.5 |
| 50-59 | 9 | 7.4 |
| Education | | |
| Freshman | 2 | 1.6 |
| Sophomore | 11 | 9.0 |
| Junior | 28 | 23.0 |
| Senior | 23 | 18.9 |
| Graduate Student | 36 | 29.5 |
| Non Student | 22 | 18.0 |

Although the target sample was originally university students, due to the small sample size nonstudents ($n = 22$) were included in the analysis.

Approximately 82% of the participants were enrolled in a college or university at the time the survey was completed (52.5% were undergrads, 29.5% were

current graduate students, 18.0% were non students). A preliminary T-test indicated no significant differences between students and non students on the measures of perfectionism, coping, stress and satisfaction with life.

Measures

Demographic Data. The following demographic information was collected: Age, gender, racial or ethnic background, year in academic program, college major or area of concentration and country or state where the participants primarily grew up.

Racial Identity. *The Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale* (Helms, 1994; Helms & Parham, 1996) is a 30-item 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) that assesses racial identity status for African Americans. The RIAS-B was designed to assess four types of racial identity statuses as identified by W.E. Cross (1971). The subscales are scored by averaging the scale items with higher subscale scores indicating a higher degree of that particular racial identity status. The four subscales of this instrument correspond to Cross's model and include Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion and Internalization. Helms and Parham (1996) reported internal consistencies for Pre-encounter ($\alpha=.69$, 9 items); Encounter ($\alpha=.50$, 4 items); Immersion/Emersion ($\alpha=.67$, 8 items); Internalization ($\alpha=.79$, 9 items). For this study, only pre-encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization status were examined. Alphas for this study were Pre-encounter ($\alpha=.74$); Immersion/Emersion ($\alpha=.66$); and Internalization ($\alpha=.73$)

Perfectionism. The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) is a 45-item self report instrument that measures perfectionism along three dimensions -self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. Hewitt and Flett (1991) reported 3 month test-retest reliabilities of .88 for self-oriented perfectionism,.85 for other oriented perfectionism and .75 for socially prescribed perfectionism. Evidence for concurrent validity has been documented in several studies. Reliability analysis in the current study yielded the following alphas: Self Oriented Perfectionism ($\alpha=.69$); Other Oriented Perfectionism ($\alpha=.65$) and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism ($\alpha=.65$)

Life Satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985) was used to assess life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a 5-item measure of a person's global life satisfaction. Respondents are asked to rate agreement with these 5 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) on questions such as "In most ways my life is close to ideal." Test retest (2 month) reliability has been shown to be .82 (Diener, et al., 1985) Internal consistency analysis in the current study is $\alpha=.86$.

Possible Mediating Variables

Stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The PSS (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) is a 14-item scale that measures the degree of self appraised life stress. Participants are asked to respond to a series of statements designed to evaluate the degree of stress experienced

within the past month on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never)-4(very often). Cohen et al. report 8-week test-retest reliability of .76. Alpha for this study was ($\alpha=.87$).

Coping Style. The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; (Endler & Parker, 1990) is a 48-item self report that examines coping style along three dimensions: Task-Oriented, Emotion-Oriented, and Avoidance Coping. Endler and Parker (1990) report 6-week test-retest reliability of .71 on the Emotion subscale, .72 on the Task subscale and .60 on the avoidance subscale for females. Reliability analysis for this study yielded the following alphas Task-Oriented ($\alpha=.93$), Emotion-Oriented ($\alpha=.896$) and Avoidance Coping ($\alpha=.876$).

Procedure

An online survey was given to all participants with the exception of the 33 participants who were recruited in person in classrooms. Individuals were invited to complete the survey through an email to listservs of various student organizations on several campuses. The campuses included some historically black colleges and universities. The email invited recipients to participate in the online survey and encouraged them to pass the invitation along to any potentially interested parties. Additionally individual email invitations were sent to professors at the universities asking that they pass along the information to their students. A link to the survey was provided in the email and listserv invitations along with instructions on how to anonymously submit their answers. The online survey consisted of a demographic questionnaire along with all of the

previously mentioned measures and detailed instructions on how to complete each. According to server statistics, there were 212 views of the survey. Of the 212 views, 114 people started the survey and 89 completed the survey.

The professors who were asked to provide the survey information to their students were also offered the option of having the researcher visit their classrooms to administer the survey in paper-pencil format. Two professors responded and agreed to allow the researcher to give the survey during class. The paper-pencil version was identical to the online version. Both professors left the room during administration and participants were given class time but no extra credit. Students were also given the option of mailing in their surveys later and were provided with materials to do so if they requested it. Names were not collected and no information regarding participation was reported to the professors. There were 42 students in the combined classrooms and 33 surveys were returned.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Means and correlations between racial identity attitude, perfectionism, coping, stress and satisfaction with life are presented in Table 2. To test hypotheses on the relationship between racial identity statuses and life satisfaction, correlations were conducted. As shown in Table 2, a pre-encounter racial identity status was negatively related to life satisfaction ($r = -.25, p < .01$). Immersion/emersion racial identity status was also negatively related to satisfaction with life ($r = -.17, p < .05$). However, Internalization racial identity status was not significantly related to life satisfaction.

Next correlations between racial identity status and perfectionism were examined. The results indicated that the pre-encounter status was not related to other oriented perfectionism. Furthermore, an Immersion/emersion racial identity status was not significantly related to socially prescribed perfectionism. However, Internalization racial identity status was positively and significantly related to socially prescribed perfectionism ($r = .18, p < .05$).

Examining the relationship between perfectionism and satisfaction with life, results showed that socially prescribed perfectionism is negatively related to satisfaction with life ($r = -.21, p = .01$). However, other oriented perfectionism was not significantly related to life satisfaction.

Table 2
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measures (N =122)

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1 MPS-Self | _____ | .45** | .26** | -.10 | -.13 | .14 | .37** | .10 | .20 | -.06 | .20* |
| 2 MPS-Social | | _____ | .20* | .12 | -.05 | .18* | .09 | .29** | -.07 | .23* | -.21* |
| 3 MPS-Other | | | _____ | .09 | -.23* | -.07 | -.13 | .26** | .03 | .21* | -.14 |
| 4 Pre-enc | | | | _____ | -.49** | -.18* | -.16 | .16 | .00 | .24** | -.25** |
| 5 Immer/Emer | | | | | _____ | .15 | -.15 | .12 | .06 | .20* | -.17* |
| 6 Intern | | | | | | _____ | .25** | -.02 | .15 | -.02 | .03 |
| 7 Task | | | | | | | _____ | -.26** | .28** | -.39** | .23* |
| 8 Emotion | | | | | | | | _____ | -.03 | .69** | -.45** |
| 9 Avoidance | | | | | | | | | _____ | -.09 | .23* |
| 10 Stress | | | | | | | | | | _____ | -.44** |
| 11 SWL | | | | | | | | | | | _____ |
| Mean | 46.75 | 55.18 | 43.80 | 16.04 | 14.65 | 35.31 | 52.69 | 48.39 | 57.52 | 22.13 | 23.39 |
| SD | 7.27 | 7.49 | 9.78 | 5.23 | 3.88 | 4.97 | 12.27 | 10.56 | 11.04 | 8.88 | 7.05 |

Note. MPS-Self=self oriented perfectionism as measured by the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991), MPS-Social=Socially prescribed perfectionism as measured by the MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991), MPS-Other=other oriented perfectionism as measured by the MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991), Pre-enc= Pre-encounter subscale as measured by the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B; Helms, 1994), Immer/Emer=Immersion/Emersion subscale as measured by the RIAS-B (Helms, 1994) Intern=Internalization subscale as measured by the RIAS-B, Task=task oriented coping as measured by the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990), Emotion= emotion oriented coping as measured by the CISS (Endler & Parker, 1990), Avoidance=avoidance oriented coping as measured by the CISS (Endler & Parker, 1990); Stress = perceived stress as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983); SWL = life satisfaction as measured by the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)

*p < .05. **p < .01

To investigate how well racial identity and perfectionism predict life satisfaction after controlling for age and education level, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 3. Age and education level were not significant predictors of satisfaction with life, $F(2, 117) = 2.127, p = .124$. The addition of the Immersion/Emersion, Internalization and Pre-encounter racial identity statuses at the second block significantly improved the prediction, $R^2 \text{ change} = .08, F(3, 114) = 3.503, p < .05$. Racial identity status accounted for 8% of the variance predicting satisfaction with life with Pre-encounter racial identity status as the most significant predictor ($\beta = -.25; p < .05$). The addition of Other-oriented, Socially prescribed and Self Oriented perfectionism in the final block further improved the prediction, $R^2 \text{ change} = .14, F(3, 111) = 6.82, p < .001$. The most significant predictor of the perfectionism block was Socially Prescribed Perfectionism ($\beta = -.35; p < .01$). The entire group of variables significantly predicted satisfaction with life $F(8, 111) = 4.725, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .20$. The full model explained 20% of the variance in the prediction of satisfaction with life.

Table 3
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Satisfaction with Life (N=122)

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---------------------|------|------|---------|
| Block 1 | | | |
| Age | -.09 | .07 | -.13 |
| Education | 1.48 | 1.88 | .08 |
| Block 2 | | | |
| Age | -.13 | .07 | -.19 |
| Education | 1.22 | 1.83 | .07 |
| Pre-encounter | -.33 | .14 | -.25* |
| Immersion/Emersion | -.10 | .19 | -.06 |
| Internalization | .08 | .13 | .06 |
| Block 3 | | | |
| Age | -.11 | .07 | -.17 |
| Education | .63 | 1.72 | .04 |
| Pre-encounter | -.21 | .14 | -.15 |
| Immersion/Emersion | -.08 | .19 | -.05 |
| Internalization | .10 | .13 | .07 |
| Self Oriented | .33 | .09 | .34** |
| Other Oriented | -.11 | .07 | -.15 |
| Socially Prescribed | -.32 | .09 | -.35** |

*p<.05. **p<.01

Mediation analyses were conducted to test the final hypothesis that coping style and stress would mediate the relationship between the perfectionism measures and satisfaction with life. Three multiple mediation analyses were conducted to assess by what means each dimension of perfectionism (self-oriented, other oriented, and socially prescribed) affects life satisfaction through the following mediators: avoidance coping, emotion coping, task coping, and stress (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Mediation analysis allows explanations of how an independent variable affects a dependent variable through one or more intervening variables. In a simple mediation analysis, a variable can be said to be a mediator if it satisfies certain criteria. First, there must be a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Second, the potential

mediating variable must be significantly correlated with the dependent variable. Lastly, when the mediating variable is controlled, the previous significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables is reduced to non significance indicating full mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

In contrast to testing several simple mediation models, a single multiple mediation analysis is beneficial when examining two or more mediators because it can determine whether the overall effect exists for all mediators (total indirect effect). It also makes it possible to determine the extent to which each mediating variable mediates the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (specific indirect effects) conditional on the other mediating variables. This approach also reduces the likelihood of biased parameter estimates caused by omitted variables which is sometimes encountered using several simple mediation models are tested separately (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

For the analyses conducted in this study, a Sobel test was used to determine whether mediation exists. This approach examines the difference between the overall effect (c) of the independent variable on the dependent variable and the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable independent of the mediator variable (c'). According to the Sobel test, if the z-score of this difference ($c - c'$) is statistically significant, then mediation exists. When the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent

variable is reduced there is partial mediation, when it is reduced to non-significance, there is complete mediation (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

First, the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and life satisfaction with stress, avoidance coping, emotion coping and task coping as possible mediators was examined. The total effect (c) of socially prescribed perfectionism on satisfaction of life was compared with the direct effect (c' – the effect independent of the potential mediators). This examination revealed that the direct effect of socially prescribed perfectionism on satisfaction with life after controlling for all of the potential mediators was reduced to non significance ($p=.37$). This indicates that total mediation exists.

Specific direct effects for this study are $a_1b_1 = -.0453$ (through stress), $a_2b_2 = .0027$ (through task coping), $a_3b_3 = -.0727$ (through emotion coping) and $a_4b_4 = -.0124$ (through avoidance coping). As can be seen in Table 4, the z score of the indirect effect (c-c') is significant. According to the Sobel test, this significant finding indicates that emotion focused coping is likely an important mediator ($Z=-1.9722$, $p<.05$).

A bootstrapping analysis was used to follow up the result. Given that the 95% confidence interval for the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and satisfaction with life through emotion oriented coping did not contain zero, the result of the bootstrapping analysis was consistent with the Sobel tests and confirmed that emotion oriented coping mediated the relationship.

Table 4. Sobel and Bootstrap Analyses of the Indirect Effect of Stress and Coping Style on the Relationship Between Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Satisfaction with Life.

| IV | Effect | z-score of the indirect effect | 95% CI of the indirect effect |
|---------|--------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Stress | -.0453 | -1.5079 | -.1573, -.0005 |
| Task | .0027 | .3415 | -.0151, .0340 |
| Emotion | -.0727 | -1.9722** | -.1849, -.0059 |
| Avoid | -.0124 | -.7235 | -.0559, .0143 |

**p<.05

Next the relationship between self oriented perfectionism and satisfaction with life was examined. An examination of the direct effect (c') of self oriented perfectionism and life satisfaction showed that the relationship continued to be significant at the $p<.05$ level. The addition of stress, avoidance coping, emotion coping and task coping as possible mediators did not significantly affect the original relationship of the independent and dependent variables indicating no mediating relationship.

Finally, since other oriented perfectionism was not significantly related to satisfaction with life, the mediation analysis was not conducted for other oriented perfectionism.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study sought to explore relationships between racial identity attitudes, dimensions of perfectionism, and satisfaction with life. The study also sought to determine whether stress and coping style mediated the relationship between perfectionism and satisfaction with life. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant positive relationship between pre-encounter racial identity attitude and other oriented perfectionism and that this would be related to lower satisfaction with life. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Contrary to this hypothesis, there was no significant relationship between a pre-encounter status of racial identity attitude and other oriented perfectionism. However, there was a significant negative relationship between pre-encounter racial identity status and satisfaction with life. This is consistent with previous studies showing a link between pre-encounter racial identity attitudes and depression, lower self esteem and decreased general well being (Pyant & Yanico, 1991; Munford, 1994).

According to Helms (1990) African American individuals in a pre-encounter identity status tend to have a negative view of the African American culture while idealizing the dominant White culture or worldview. In order to stay in this status, the individual would need to find ways to separate and distinguish herself from her own culture in order to manage the discomfort that arises from the thought "This group is bad but I am a part of it." This can lead to

feelings of low self esteem and, as shown in this study, less satisfaction with life and a higher level of stress. The lack of correlation between pre-encounter and other oriented perfectionism could be due to individuals in the pre-encounter status being involved in more of an internal process of negotiating the conflict between internalized negative feelings for one's own culture while struggling to find their own self worth. Although one may expect there to be some expectations or judgments against others, particularly members of their own culture, the internal focus may be more salient in these individuals. While none of the perfectionism dimensions significantly correlated with pre-encounter, the strongest relationship in this study for the pre-encounter status was with socially prescribed perfectionism. This would indicate some pressure to be perfect originating from outside of the self, in this case perhaps from the majority culture.

It was also hypothesized that there would be a significant negative relationship between immersion/emersion racial identity status and other oriented perfectionism along with lower satisfaction with life. This hypothesis was supported. The results indicated a significant negative relationship between immersion/emersion and satisfaction with life. Immersion/emersion was also significantly related to other oriented perfectionism.

In Cross's (1971) original model the Immersion and Emersion stages were described separately with both being characterized by a withdrawal into the Black world. In this stage, the individual has his/her ideas about what makes a

“true” Black person and an expectation that other Blacks conform to this view. In Immersion the definition of “true Blackness” is often from external sources while in Emersion there is an opportunity to sort out the positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses of the Black culture and define one’s own belief about the culture (Helms, 1990). The expectation that other African Americans conform to a stereotype about what it means to be a true member of the culture may lead to judgments about what is right or wrong similar to those encountered in individuals who are higher on the other oriented perfectionism dimension of perfectionism. Previous research has also shown a connection between Immersion/Emersion and anger and hostility (Parham & Helms, 1985). The current study found a higher level of stress and lower satisfaction with life.

It was also hypothesized that there would be a significant positive relationship between internalization status of racial identity and socially prescribed perfectionism and greater satisfaction with life. Results of correlational analysis indicated that internalization racial identity status was associated with socially prescribed perfectionism. However there was no significant relationship between internalization and satisfaction with life although there was a significant negative relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and satisfaction with life.

This relationship was further examined through the mediation analysis which found that emotion focused coping completely mediated the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and satisfaction with life. In the model

socially prescribed perfectionism had a significant negative relationship with satisfaction with life. When emotion focused coping was controlled in the model, the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and satisfaction with life was no longer significant indicating that coping style mediated the relationship. This showed support for the belief that the way individuals cope with situations may influence their psychological functioning. According to Endler and Parker (1990) emotion-focused coping is related to various facets of psychopathology as measured by the Basic Personality Inventory. In the current study, emotion-focused coping was strongly correlated to stress in the positive direction and satisfaction with life in the negative.

Overall the present study adds to the rather limited literature on perfectionism in ethnic minority groups. This study's focus on African American women and their racial identity gives important information on within group differences that may contribute to psychological well being. Although not all of the hypotheses were supported, several interesting pieces of information were generated from this study. First the finding that the pre-encounter and Immersion/Emersion statuses were significantly related to satisfaction with life highlights the relevance of cultural factors when considering assessment and intervention strategies for African American women. Additionally the significant contribution of coping style to satisfaction with life may give some guidance in how to intervene with clients in a clinical setting. The findings suggest that

reducing the reliance on Emotion Oriented Coping strategies may be important in improving life satisfaction.

Limitations

Some limitations to the current study should be considered. First, although regression analysis was used in the larger model the use of correlational analyses in the more specific relationships does not allow for implying causality. Additionally, the current study's cross sectional design only gives a snap shot view of the relationships between these variables. Furthermore, some relationships between variables may not have reached significance due to the small sample size. The sample size also limited the types of analyses that could be performed on this data set.

The length of the questionnaire may have been a factor in the number of potential participants who viewed the questionnaire but failed to complete it. There was no discernible pattern in the amount of information participants completed before discontinuing the survey. Data is not available on all participants who viewed the questionnaire. However, several participants started the questionnaire and discontinued without giving enough data to use in the study. A view of the demographic data completed by those who started the survey (n=24) revealed that they are similar to those who completed it in many ways. Approximately 83% of the non completers were current students (41.67% were undergraduates, 41.67 were graduate students and 16.67 were non students. The age range was 19-57 years (M= 29.64, SD=10.18). What is not

known are the characteristics of those who did not complete even the demographic data. One could speculate that individuals who were higher on the perfectionism scales may have been more likely to complete the survey once started. It is also possible that African American students are often asked to participate in research related to race and may choose not to complete surveys in this area due to feeling overwhelmed or for other reasons.

Participants in this study were recruited from Texas colleges and university. Having a population of mostly students in Texas may also make it difficult to generalize the results to other students even in the South. Due to the large Hispanic population in Texas, racial attitudes may be different than in other areas of the Southern United States where the ethnic breakdown may be different.

Also, this study was primarily web based with the portion of the respondents who completed the paper and pencil versions of the questionnaire all being college students recruited within the classroom. Although preliminary analysis indicated no significant difference on the various measures between college students and non college students, there may still be cause to question the generalizability of the results to the African American female population at large and non internet users. However, there are some important implications for mental health professionals working with African American women.

Conclusions, Implications and Future Research

The current study seems to provide some findings that are important in advancing the understanding of factors that may contribute to life satisfaction among African American women. In the current study racial identity, perfectionism and coping style were found to be important predictors of life satisfaction. Having an understanding of factors that contribute to overall well being in African American women may have important implications for mental health professionals.

The relationship between racial identity and satisfaction with life in African American women found in the current study suggests that mental health professionals may need to include racial identity in their initial assessment. Mental health professionals may benefit from including racial identity and coping style in their conceptualization of their clients' presenting problems. This awareness of these and other cultural variables may help the mental health professional avoid making inaccurate generalizations about clients and may ultimately improve the working alliance.

The finding that emotion focused coping mediates the relationship between perfectionism and life satisfaction is also very important in understanding how to best help African American females. In the current study emotion focused coping mediated the negative relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and satisfaction with life. In the presence of emotion oriented focusing, socially prescribed perfectionism was related to lower

satisfaction with life. According to Endler and Parker (1999), the Emotion-oriented scale describes self oriented emotional reactions that are intended to reduce stress. The reactions include emotional responses such as self-blame for becoming emotional, becoming angry or tense, fantasizing or daydreaming. Endler and Parker (1999) state that the attempt to reduce stress is not always successful and, in fact, sometimes stress is increased using these strategies.

This finding has implications for work with African American females who are high on Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Emotion-focused coping. The implementation of strategies designed to move the client towards healthier coping strategies with less self blame and more of a focus on accepting healthy emotions. Therapies such as Interpersonal Therapy with a focus on exploring and expressing emotions and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with a focus on accepting emotions without self judgment may be helpful.

Future studies may consider using a longitudinal research design to help gain more knowledge on possible causal factors. The current studies cross sectional design only gives snap shot view of the relationships between these variables not allowing for inferences about causality. Additionally, future studies may consider using a different measure of stress focusing on specific life events to get a better understanding of how specific events can affect psychological functioning and coping. This may give an added understanding of how unique life experiences such as those resulting from group membership may affect life satisfaction. For example a study using a measure of acculturative stress may

give further knowledge on the experience of life satisfaction within specific groups.

The finding that Socially Prescribed Perfectionism was significantly and negatively related to Life Satisfaction is consistent with previous studies that have indicated that perceived pressure from others to perform well (Socially Prescribed Perfectionism, Parental Expectation, Parental Criticism) has more of a negative effect on psychological functioning in individuals from a minority status than has been observed in White individuals. This might indicate that parental and family expectations are important influences on psychological adjustment with certain groups. Thus a study of familism as it relates to perfectionism and life satisfaction would be an interesting area of inquiry for future research. This in addition to more studies on how racial identity affects life satisfaction and well being among different populations will add to the body of literature on cultural influences of psychological adjustment.

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